

The fifth in a series of brief expositions on the advantages of APHA membership—this article considers the special benefits to the mental health worker of his affiliation with the Mental Health Section.

MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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MENTAL health professionals have long been regarded as isolates among the health professions. For a long time they were literally confined to state hospitals away from the rest of the community, separated from other social institutions, and even from the remainder of health care. Over the last three decades gradual change has occurred to the point where we now find that the majority of these mental health professionals operate in the community, in general hospitals, clinics, schools, privately, in courts, industry, and, indeed, wherever all other health care exists. This changing pattern, accelerated since World War II and brought to a head by the development of the psychoactive drugs, has finally resulted in the revolutionary proposal, by President Kennedy, of the comprehensive community mental health care center as the pattern of the future for mental illness and retardation.

We now find ourselves confronted by the necessity to determine needs, plan new organizational, administrative and functional structures, recruit additional scarce personnel, and take on, by tomorrow, tasks of prevention, education, and care which ordinarily require decades to evolve. These problems are in large measure the responsibility of a group of professionals which has, in its isolation, been forced to communicate among

themselves rather than with others who have faced similar problems for decades, gradually shaping tested solutions to the difficulties repeatedly encountered.

It is at this juncture that the other disciplines included in public health may be of inestimable help in shaping the future. This basic approach, including epidemiologic investigations to determine incidence, prevalence and associated variables of disease, the planning of programs for prevention and control, public health education, the application of individual and mass clinical methods, the design and execution of well controlled scientific evaluation of program leading to improvement, has always characterized what is termed the public health approach. It is best exemplified in the magnificent efforts of the U. S. Public Health Service and its various specialized National Institutes of Health which are thoroughly imbued with this outlook.

For almost a century the American Public Health Association has been the common meeting ground of those scientists and professional workers from all the various disciplines operating on all integrative levels who are responsible for the nation's health. During this century they have developed the systematic methods that have all but conquered and controlled the killers of the 19th century,

the acute infectious diseases, and have been for the last few decades heavily involved with those needed for the chronic disorders. They have developed, presented, tested, and discussed models among many others, for tuberculosis, heart disease, and neurologic disorders which are now available as examples for use in the construction of mental health programs. The APHA members and the permanent staff have been constantly on the alert for new developments in federal, state, and local programs and legislation, which are often initiated and shaped by them and always reported back to the membership for their information, discussion, and possible action.

The distillation of the research and discussion on the basic and applied aspects of disease etiology, prevention, and care is published monthly in the internationally highly respected *American Journal of Public Health* and is widely consulted. However, it is no substitute for attendance at the annual meetings where in the intimacy of cross-disciplinary exchanges the details of scientific methodology and statistical analysis, as well as the daily mundane problems of program administration, are communicated and clarified. This is even more pertinent for the activities of the Sections into which the Association is divided on a program area and disciplinary basis. These not only construct the annual programs, both single Section and cross-Sectional, but through the work of their committees produce reports, guides, manuals, and resolutions for the specific health areas. Some of the Sections of interest to mental health workers are those on Epidemiology, Maternal and Child Health, Medical Care, Public Health Education, Public Health Nursing, and School Health.

In 1955, in recognition of the his-

toric needs and at the democratic instigation of some of the members specifically concerned, a Mental Health Section was established which has been actively at work since. It is in this Section that the psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, teachers, occupational and recreational therapists, hospital and clinic administrators, nurses, group workers, student counselors, and others who had no common national organizational meeting ground previously are now able to exchange thought and data on mutual problems. Members and Fellows of the Section have taken active part and are playing key roles in developing publications which are of particular import to mental health professionals such as the recently issued "Mental Disorders: A Guide to Control Methods" and "Functions and Service of a Community Mental Health Program"; guides on rehabilitation in chronic disease and on the control of emotional disturbances, epilepsy, mental retardation, communicative disorders and cerebral palsy; and materials on genetics and genetic counseling, narcotics addiction, alcoholism, and numerous others.

The Mental Health Section welcomes and needs the participation of all professional workers in its activities. Only by sharing its knowledge and that accumulated by all the other health program areas, as well as that contributed to the intellectual melting pot by the continuous inflow of new members, will it be possible for mental health competently to fulfill its modern role and finally to incorporate it as an integral part of the corpus of public health. This is not a one way street; the remainder of health care programs needs the skills and insights developed over the decades by mental health workers to enrich their own portions of the whole body of public health.

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